

PURPOSE OF A PREMISE

1. To decide what the cartoon is about.
2. To state in a general sense what we plan to do with the beginning, middle and end.
3. To convince Nick. that the cartoon is worth doing.

STEPS IN WRITING A PREMISE

WRITING PROCESS

IDEA

FIRST GAG SESSION - EXPLORATION OF IDEAS

A gang knocks around ideas completely freely. (IMPORTANT! This step has to be done with a group.)

THEME - Without a theme a premise lacks focus. Collect your notes. Decide what the premise is about. Find the strongest theme from your notes. Take out any ideas that do not fit that theme and save them for another cartoon.

The more sophisticated the theme, the harder it is to do.

The ideal in short piece like cartoons is to have one central theme like **Space Madness** or **Nurse Stimpy**. The more themes you have, the less time you have to illustrate each one.

An example of too many story lines or theme is **Stimpy's Big Day**. There were so many themes in this story that we had to stretch it into two episodes, and even then the story was clumsy because we couldn't spend enough time to explore strong points effectively. The happy ending doesn't work because we had to rush through it.

Another problem can arise when there is no theme or the theme isn't stated clearly, as in **Black Hole**. Here we have stuff happening, but we don't know why it's happening. And it never leads anywhere, so we end up with 12 minutes of stuff.

Your theme does not have to be profound as in **Space Madness** or **Ren's Bad Habits**; it can be as simple as **Firedogs**. The theme here is just to explore gags that have to do with fighting fire. Very simple. Hopefully most of our cartoons will be this simple.

GUIDELINES - Be sure that the theme fits in with Ren and Stimpy's characters.

PREMISE - Construct story into its simplest parts. **NOTE:** Always number and label as is done below.

- 1. THEME** - (or Premise or Set Up)
State your theme right up front, simply and clearly! Make the reader understand exactly what the story is about.
- 2. BODY** - Give a general idea how you are going to explore the theme. Maybe one or two example gags.
- 3. END** - Try to make it short and simple.

PURPOSE OF AN OUTLINE

The outline is not so much a creative process.

It is a skill. It is almost a mathematical process. It is a way to organize your creative thoughts into a form that best illustrates or shows off your ideas in a way that can be clearly understood by somebody else.

The outline is not an art form. It is not a finished piece of work. It does not have to be beautiful unto itself. The words themselves are less important than the ideas they represent. Your prose should be just good enough to keep the reader interested enough to finish the story.

- 1. SALES TOOL** - It must be easy to read, easy to understand and will take Nickelodeon's attitudes in mind.
- 2. WORKING TOOL** - It must work out the order of events without nailing out all the details and gags. It must keep the storyboard (and animators) in mind. Make it easy for someone else to produce.

STEPS IN WRITING AN OUTLINE

GAG SESSION #2 - Explore the "body" or middle of the cartoon (stay focused on the theme).

OUTLINE - Write down the gags. Give them headings. List gags on computer.

JUGGLE YOUR HEADINGS - Ask yourself if the jokes build. Try to find an order to your ideas that best illustrates your theme and builds excitement. At this point you will probably find holes in your story structure. You will be asking yourself, "how do we get from this heading to that heading?".

Build construction with the headings.

When holes in construction occur, don't hesitate to **talk to the other writers for help**.

THEME - Set up theme very clearly. Do not just state the theme as in the premise. The more sophisticated the theme, the more carefully you need to set it up. You have to instill this idea in the audience through story-telling technique, not exposition.

WRITE FINAL DRAFT - Describe what happens in each sequence, succinctly but with enough writing style to make it an entertaining read, **But never let flowery prose get in the way of clarity!**

REREAD IT CRITICALLY - Read your story with all the above notes in mind. Ask yourself these questions:

1. What is it about? (Theme)
2. Is it clearly about that?
3. Are there holes in the story? (Structure)
4. Does it build? (Structure)
5. Is it easy to read and understand?
6. Is it easy to draw/produce?
7. Do the gags depend on being spoken? (We do not want too many of these)
8. Will it make Nickelodeon mad? (Remember your readers, it won't sell if it makes them mad)
9. Is it funny? (This should go without saying, but if it doesn't address all of the above questions, it's not finished)

EXAMPLES AND COMPARISONS: (To be worked out)

Space Madness
Nurse Stimpy
Robin Hoek
Role Switch
In The Army